

SYSTEMS CHANGE EDUCATION IN AN INNOVATION CONTEXT

Report & Reflections

By Anna Birney, Joshua Cubista,
Daniela Papi-Thornton, and
Laura Winn

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SYSTEMS CHANGE EDUCATION IN AN INNOVATION CONTEXT **SUMMIT**





In September 2018, a group of 40 educators, entrepreneurs, and systems change experts gathered at Yale School of Management, to participate in a two-day summit focused on “Systems Change Education in the Innovation Context.” Throughout the event educators and practitioners shared their diverse perspectives and initiatives, competency frameworks, programmatic initiatives, and course syllabi, in order to surface and learn from best practices of leading institutions and organizations from around the world. The collection of learning and examples of systems change education in action were provocative and diverse, and the conveners wanted to find a way to share this collection of knowledge and action with a wider audience.

The event included a “Gallery Walk” of systems education tools, competencies, and frameworks that can be viewed here: systemschangeeducation.com


This report provides a deeper look at the perspectives and possibilities sparked from the conversations at Yale School of Management, with summaries of the key themes, and links to additional resources. This report includes a deeper dive into a selection of initiatives underway globally that exemplify the highlighted perspectives and competencies for effective systems change education in an innovation context with the hope that these might be built upon and spread.

The authors’ learning and perspectives have also been shaped through a number of other similar gatherings, such as the [Systems Change Field Building Convening](#) on Wasan Island and the [Systems Change Education in Canada Convening](#) in Vancouver.

We hope this report honors the diverse learning and perspectives of our global colleagues who are working to bring systems change education into an innovation context and beyond.

INTRO-
DUCTION





The Western education system has long been diagnosed as not fit for purpose for a post-industrial world. Trends in education since the 1980s have been turning more and more towards addressing practical and real world challenges – for example the growth in business and management schools and disciplines such as design education and action research. The growth of the social entrepreneurship and social innovation movements has been accompanied by rapid development of practice-oriented learning offerings in business schools and universities on social entrepreneurship and social design.

However, these disciplines still fail to widely address the systemic nature of the challenges we face, or prepare people to tackle interconnected “wicked-problems” such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and inequality¹. Management and business education is failing to train people with the skills organizations will need to operate in an increasingly uncertain world. The focus on social ventures and social enterprise in the multitude of start-up training programs and incubators still draws from a largely linear solutions-based model, forefronting new venture creation and organizational growth over more complex and multi-leveled approaches to social change.

Although sustainability and social innovation education has been on the rise and has called for ‘the necessary transformation of higher education towards the integrative and more whole state implied by a systemic view of sustainability in education and society’², change has been slow to come about.

This is partly because the adoption of systemic approaches critiques not only the curriculum but the paradigm of education itself, questioning how we might need to learn these new capabilities³. Across formal education disciplines, teacher-centred pedagogy is the dominant paradigm⁴. Students and teachers still follow the learning patterns of the apprentice-master power dynamic. Academic knowledge is valued over lived experience. Curricula are designed for predetermined outcomes, with very little space for living dynamics and emergence.

Over the last few decades, calls for ‘earth-literate leaders’⁵ have intensified with growing recognition of the interconnectedness of sustainability challenges that span beyond the triple-bottom line of social, environmental and financial systems. Increasingly, we are having to look at the closely intertwined issues of governance, justice, and decision making when considering what social innovation and sustainability imply in a dynamic and complex world.

1. Capra, F. and Luisi, P. (2014) *A systems view of life, a unifying vision*, Cambridge University Press (see resources section below)

2. Sterling, S. (2004). ‘Higher education, sustainability and the role of systemic learning’, in Corcoran, P.B. and Wals, A. E. J. (eds) *Higher Education and the Challenge of Sustainability: Problematics, Promise, and Practice*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, 47-70.


3. A [paper written about the School of System Change as a system change endeavour](#) has inspired this introduction and explores how this initiative has looked at putting this question at the heart of it’s approach.

4. Souleles, N. (2017). Design for social change and design education: Social challenges versus teacher-centred pedagogies. *The Design Journal*, 20(sup1), S927–S936. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14606925.2017.1353037>

5. Martin, S., & Jucker, R. (2005). Educating Earth-literate Leaders. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 29(1), 19–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098260500030298>

SYSTEMS CHANGE IN INNOVATION EDUCATION





Systems change terminology is rippling its way through social innovation vernacular and leaving a lot of questions in its wake. What do people mean when they say systems change, and how does one teach that? Who is already making a shift and what can we learn from those existing efforts? And why are social entrepreneurship and innovation educators needed as a key levers in the shift from a focus on organizational growth to collective systems change? This report is designed to help explore those questions and invite educators to bring a systems lens into their social innovation offerings.

Social innovation and social entrepreneurship educators are in a unique position to further the work of shifting unhealthy local and global systems. But to do that, educational offerings need to move beyond the typical social entrepreneurship education model. In many programs, social entrepreneurship is taught simply as social venture creation: pick a social issue, learn a bit about it, create a new product or service offering to impact change, and try to scale a company and potentially its impact. The problem with that model is that it is furthering a social change narrative that is based on individual organizational growth, leaving the onus of change on each individual social venture often in its own silo. Changing unhealthy systems dynamics, however, requires a range of interconnected shifts, not just in new venture creation but in changing the structure of existing systems and the relationships between the actors within those systems. Without changes at the system level, individualized results of new social ventures will have minimal impact on the wider issues of our time. Furthermore, the myth of the lone hero entrepreneur creates a false hierarchy among innovators that fosters a narrative that undermines the dire need for more collaborative approaches to addressing complex challenges. As such, innovation and entrepreneurship educators have the opportunity, if not responsibility, to invite a wider systemic understanding of the interconnected and complex dynamics facing society. The nature of this kind of educational innovation goes well beyond the expansion of new venture creation alone toward the fostering of future systems-led change leaders.

A Business Perspective

This call for systems change to be integrated into innovation education comes alongside similar provocations to business education as a whole to introduce new core competencies in the face of 21st century challenges. [An explorative study](#) has highlighted that the standardized curricula of business schools do not match sufficiently with the needs expressed by business leaders for integrated systems knowledge, ecosystem design, and collaborative innovation efforts.


Businesses recognise that there is growing complexity and uncertainty in the world they are operating in, and would welcome people who are better equipped and more resilient in the face of this uncertainty. Those business leaders who are more deeply committed to sustainability understand that collaboration is key for breakthrough innovations towards more sustainable models such as the circular economy, and are interested in recruiting people with the capacity to build coalitions and ecosystems for transformative change.

From Social Enterprise to a Systems Change Lens

As noted previously, the competencies and perspectives needed to launch social ventures are different from those needed to understand and contribute to shifting unhealthy systems. The story of the social enterprise MyBnk, a UK based youth financial education organization, is a useful example to highlight different approaches, as the organization's leadership moved from a more traditional social enterprise model into a more systems-led model.

MyBnk was founded in 2007 by Lily Lapenna. After spending time working in Bangladesh and learning about BRAC's microfinance programs, she returned to the UK and realized that many of the young people she encountered at home could also use financial education. With the advice and partnership of social entrepreneurship experts, Lily founded MyBnk and the organization developed methodology, toolkits, and curricula for teaching financial literacy within schools, youth groups, supported housing organizations, and institutes for youth offenders. To fund their work, they began selling their offerings in schools across the UK and around the world as well as fundraising and building corporate and public partnerships.

During the course of the first few years, the bootstrapped team kept their head down, working on developing their educational approach and competed with other financial education providers for limited funding. After a few years, Lily noted that collaborating with their perceived "competitors"




had the potential to create greater impact than any one organization could achieve on their own. They partnered with the Personal Finance Education Group (now known as Young Money), and helped create a youth financial education cross-partisan working group consisting of government officials, financial education providers, and entrepreneurs. Within two years, this group was able to contribute to changes in UK Law. Financial education is now compulsory in state maintained secondary schools across the country.

In reflection, Lily shared this with us, “If we had followed a more typical social enterprise approach, we might have focused solely on our organizational growth, trying to sell and raise funds for more of our services and grow our direct bottom line and impact. The work we did with the government partnership, and other working groups, such as the one that helped push for financial literacy education for all youth leaving foster care at age 21, took me and my leadership team away from day to day program sales and fundraising. Those policy changes didn’t grow our organization, but they helped shift the financial literacy system in the UK and I believe our efforts in those areas had bigger impacts than any growth in our individual programs sales could have achieved. If we had been working with social investors who wanted us to simply focus on financial sustainability, they might not have been happy to see their CEO spending so much time at meetings with competitors or policy makers. This shift, from building and scaling our social enterprise to contributing to wider systems-level work was one that took both a perspective, mindset, and skill shift. We might have more people making that shift if all social entrepreneurs who want to contribute to solving social or environmental problems were given training on working with government, influencing policy change, and collaborating across networks. Those skills aren’t taught in most social enterprise start-up programs, but they should be!”

Lily received an MBE from the Queen for her work, and MyBnk continues to grow both as a social enterprise and as an advocate for wider systems change in relation to youth financial education.

COMPETENCIES & PERSPECTIVES FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE EDUCATION





Often innovation and entrepreneurship education tend toward single issue analysis, siloed approaches to addressing challenges, or market-based opportunities that focus on ROI before broader social impact. In the face of increasingly complex, fast-paced, local and global issues, increasing socio-ecological crisis, and rapid technological advancement, the field of education, like many other dearly held traditions/institutions, is being forced to rapidly evolve so as to be relevant to the needs of learners today and those of the future.

The perspectives often embedded in systems change approaches enable learners, educators, and practitioners to explore a holistic understanding of the systems within which we live, those that we create, and how the strategies we enact impact the health of our systems and our society at-large. Systems change competencies include a broad spectrum of methods, tools, approaches, and capacities that are often developed through applied practice and experiential learning in the field. Both systems change competencies and perspectives together provide pathways toward understanding the interconnected complex social, ecological, technical and cultural challenges and opportunities that learners and practitioners face in the 21st century.

This report highlights a growing trend in the field of education to include systems change competencies and perspectives in program curricula. The shift toward systems change focused education engages learners beyond the conventional confines of traditional institutions with real world challenges in their broader innovation and educational ecosystems. During the *Systems Change Education in an Innovation Context* summit, contributors participated in a rapid brainstorming session to identify key competency areas, ideal courses, and potential learning labs for systems change education. What emerged was a broad reflection on the kinds of skills, perspectives, and areas of learning and practice that educators and practitioners can include when teaching and facilitating systems change education and capacity building. The following text boxes illuminate the broad spectrum of competency areas and perspectives that practitioners highlighted as foundations for systems change education.

COMPETENCIES & PERSPECTIVES FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE EDUCATION

Fundamental Skills & Areas for Learning

Reflection - Listening - Communication - Mental models - Empathy - Self-awareness - Storytelling - Living systems theory - Futures - Prototyping - Complex systems - Design - Wicked problems - Power - Privilege - Diversity - Inclusion - Positionality - Social movements - Multi-stakeholder - Values - Nature immersion - Systems mapping - Embodiment practice - Socio-ecological justice

Practitioner Skills & Areas of Practice

Relationship building - Collaboration - Decision making - Systems dynamics - Conflict resolution - Stakeholder analysis & engagement - Facilitation - Mediation - Negotiation - Coalition building - Data analysis & management - Humility - Conscious and unconscious bias - Ethical self-inquiry - Measurement & evaluation - Ethnographic interviewing - Deep listening - Appreciative inquiry - Creative process - Group process - Community organizing - Philanthropy - Hosting - Trust-building - Leverage points - Adaptation & scale - Learning journeys - Capacity building - Participatory methodology - Labs - Systems theory and frameworks

Core Competencies, Methods, & Perspectives in Systems Change Education

Across the emerging field of systems change education, there are a wide array of perspectives and methods that together comprise the core competencies of systems change practitioners. What follows is an exploration of overarching themes that align across many competency frameworks. It is not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather illuminate a set of core competencies represented by practitioners at the summit and beyond within higher education programs, certificate programs, and practitioner training.

An example of a systems change education competency model can be seen through the regional and national curriculum development project of the Social Innovation Institute in Toronto, Canada and its affiliated national network Social Innovation Canada respectively. Within these two levels of regional and national scale (including higher education institutions, civil society, non-profit sector, and corporate sector) the initial competency areas being developed for curriculum are:

1. Systems strategy
2. Working across difference and power
3. Collaboration practice and process
4. Social finance and social enterprise
5. Systems leadership and personal practice
6. The innovation process
7. Scaling and implementation, and
8. Strategic learning and evaluation.

You can explore more about how this systems change education model is working to build capacity as part of the [SI Canada initiative here](#).

In general, and as the prior example suggests, systems change competencies tend towards an integrative breadth and depth of learning and engagement that can support learners and practitioners when applying what they learn to address real-world challenges. Many competency frameworks emphasize their own unique elements of systems change practice and use descriptive language that is context specific to their given approach, place, and populations with whom they work and learn.

What follows is a brief overview of a select set of aligned competency areas that emerged across the approaches of participants at the summit. Each systems competency area includes a brief description and is partnered with examples from specific programs and/or organizational approaches to systems change education from summit contributors. The following is put forward as both inspiration and reflection upon how educators can incorporate systems change education into their programmatic and curricular repertoire.

Areas of Systems Competency



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Inner Work

Summit participants as well as educators and practitioners in the field of systems change education often highlight *inner work*, or the work of personal development, as being of foundational importance in the development of a competent systems change practice. Inner work is not only an essential component of systems change education, but also an essential commitment of the systems change educator, as in order to shift educational models, we educators need to model and grow in similar ways. Inner work can include such things as the development of self-awareness and emotional intelligence of the learner/practitioner, mindfulness practices such as meditation or journaling, understanding positionality, privilege, and power both within oneself and within group dynamics, or practicing self-care and fostering empathy as an innovator. Incorporating inner work into education is a process of including the social/emotional wellbeing of learners, practitioners, and communities into the fabric of our educational programs. One of the aims of inner work is to cultivate the quality of presence and awareness that enables learners and practitioners to continuously address complex challenges and work with people around issues that touch upon our deepest aspirations and our most deeply held beliefs. Examples from the field as represented by participants at the summit whose approaches incorporate inner work include:

Theory U & Presencing

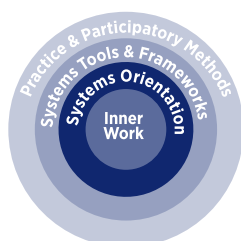
Presencing Institute

Ways of Thinking, Being, and Doing

Rebecca Riccio, Social Impact Lab, Northeastern University

Awareness-based Systems Change

The Academy for Systems Change



Systems Orientation

One of the primary areas that unites systems change education is a focus on what could be called a systems orientation. A systems orientation focuses on understanding complex adaptive systems and supports actors within a given system to contribute toward the health, vitality, and desired future of a given system. A systems orientation can support learners and practitioners alike in the process of developing and advancing innovations, ventures, or solution efforts that have long term positive benefit to society. Furthermore, a

systems orientation allows us to explore the interrelated complex nature of the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. This in turn enables learners to identify appropriate methods and technologies to address challenges that no one individual, organization, institution, or nation can address alone. This orientation requires basic systems thinking skills as well as incentives, training, and examples that enable one to embrace and explore complexity as it relates to shifting unjust systems. Whether an issue is ecological or social in nature, a systems orientation suggests that issues are in fact interconnected and therefore must be addressed across domains rather than approached in isolation. Therefore, systems change education is an inherently collaborative endeavor. Examples of systems oriented approaches and programs can be explored further through the contributions of:

Map The System

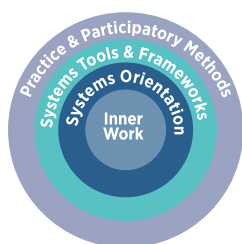
The Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship

A Definition of Systems Change

Anna Birney, Darcy Riddell, and Laura Winn

Transition Design: Design for Systems Level Change

Terry Irwin, Carnegie Mellon University's School of Design



Systems Tools & Frameworks

Systems change educators have a wide array of tools, methods, and frameworks at their disposal when teaching and applying systems change theory and practice. Tools such as systems mapping or creating causal loop diagrams support the understanding of underlying systems dynamics and the relationship between actors in a given system. Frameworks such as [Donella Meadows Leverage Points](#) support the identification of places to intervene in a system. Processes, on the other hand, such as [Theory U](#) illuminate steps for navigating and co-creating change within systems, organizations, and our systems at-large. Systems tools and frameworks enable both educators and learners to explore root causes that contribute to complex issues and how those root causes may be addressed. Additionally, through the application and exploration of tools and frameworks learners can challenge their assumptions and worldviews as they develop the competencies needed to create positive systems impact in the field. With a broad spectrum of tools and frameworks on display during the summit Gallery Walk, program and practitioner examples in this area include:

COMPETENCIES & PERSPECTIVES FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE EDUCATION

Systems Practice Overview

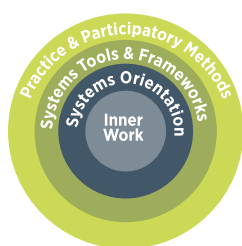
Rob Ricigliano, The Omidyar Group

Habits of a System Thinker

Tracy Benson, Waters Foundation

Impact Gaps Canvas

Daniela Papi-Thornton, Systems-Led Leadership



Practice & Participatory Methods

As stated previously, systems change education focuses on real world impact and the development of competencies and perspectives that are relevant to specific contexts and interrelated opportunities and challenges. One of the hallmarks of systems change education is the development of competencies through practice experience and field-based learning focusing on applied practice rather than theoretical understanding alone. Summit attendees underscored that systems change education at its best incorporates interdisciplinary capacity building toward participatory or multi-stakeholder approaches in order to prepare learners to address interrelated complex challenges rather than focusing on conventional approaches to individual skill development.

Furthermore, in the face of increasingly complex socio-ecological challenges, systems change practices tend toward experimentation and rapid prototyping of solutions and innovations, rather than traditional approaches to long-term planning or forecasting trajectories based upon current trends. This suggests a meaningful shift in education away from individual achievement toward preparing learners to be skilled practitioners of collaborative and experimental systems change practices and methods. Examples from the field that illustrate this shift include:

Leadership in Complex Systems

The Global Knowledge Initiative's Sara Farley, Renee Vuillaume, & Chase Keenan, as a deliverable for USAID

Systems Change Capabilities

Anna Birney, Forum for the Future

Community Based Systems Dynamics

Allison Simpson, Washington University in Saint Louis



Additional Considerations:

‘Knowledge Equity’ in the Classroom

As highlighted in the introduction, teacher-centred pedagogy is the dominant paradigm across formal education disciplines. But the background of educators and others invited into the classroom can also be dominated by people from a particular background.

One of the first provocations in the Yale convening was a reflection on the makeup of the room: the room was largely made up of white people, many of whom were teaching in and had been educated in elite institutions. The group noted that the room reflected the social innovation sector at large, as often it is members of elite demographics who are both taking and teaching such classes. If we are going to maximize the impact of social innovation education to shift systems, we not only need to reconsider the content of our classrooms, but also the makeup of the classes and who is teaching them.

Many educators have the power to shape who is in their classroom, both on the part of the students and the other lecturers, as well as whose voice gets heard, what expertise is valued, and what is or isn't rewarded, both financially and academically. [Baljeet Sandhu's work](#), which is explored further in the upcoming Value of Lived Experience section of this report, provides an important primer and provocation on considering the value, or lack thereof, we place on lived expertise in the social sector at large. If we are going to rethink social innovation education, we can't do so without reconsidering who holds power in our institutions and discourse: who is teaching, what is being taught, who is being taught, and what is being valued to address some of the world's most pressing issues.

As Baljeet notes, “We need to ensure that we do not perpetuate the very systems we are trying to address. Inadvertently or otherwise, we're locking out valuable knowledge and expertise from our own institutions. Those with educational and financial privilege are not the only systems changemakers, innovators or social leaders in our world. Leaders with lived experience are not simply historical figures nor unique. They exist in every town, city and village. In every country. Including the West. We can start by acknowledging, crediting and involving these leaders in our work. We need knowledge equity in social innovation education.”

Antoinette D. Carroll of the Creative Reaction Lab uses the term equity

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designers for those with lived experience of an inequity who want to help shift the inequitable system, and uses the term design allies for those who don't have lived experience of the inequity but want to leverage their power in support of the equity designers. As educators, we have the opportunity to self-reflect on our own work, and how and when we might serve as equity designers and where we would better serve as design allies, lifting up and supporting the work of those with lived experience of the challenges social innovation seeks to alleviate.

Knowledge Equity Initiative

Baljeet Sandhu and the Tsai CITY Team

Neighbors in Residence (NiR) Program

Onyeka Obiocha and the Tsai CITY Team

Philippi Campus

Francois Bonnici, University of Cape Town GSB

Funding for Systems Change

An additional element of systems change education and practice that is of great importance though goes beyond the scope of this report, is that of funding for systems change initiatives and programs. While this is not necessarily a competency or perspective related to systems change education, many social innovation and social entrepreneurship programs also focus on social finance, and making the distinction between funding organizational growth and funding systems change is an important consideration. In fact, sometimes they are at odds, as focusing on organizational scale or the financial and social returns of a single systems actor, as is often the case is social investing models, can sometimes be antithetical to investing in wider systems change impacts that cannot be attributed to any one organization's efforts. New approaches to systems change funding are being developed and explored globally, and this shift is exemplified by an emerging evolution from single initiative or organization focused funding, and traditional social investing of single domain specific initiatives toward systems level funding that enables practitioners to work across silos and develop solutions that address root causes of complex issues. For further exploration of this area facing systems change educators and practitioners alike, please see:



The Evolving Operating System of Philanthropy

Rob Ricigliano for the In Too Deep blog

Philanthropy and systems change: If philanthropy wants to change the system does it need to change itself first?

Special feature, Alliance Magazine March 2019

Global stories of best practice for funding systemic initiatives

Chelsea Robinson, Derek Aspacher, and Mike Kang 2019

Scaling Solutions toward Shifting Systems


Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors reports in 2017 and 2018

While this select set of core competency areas and perspectives reflect aspects of the larger systems change education field, it is primarily focused upon competency frameworks from the Systems Change Education in an Innovation Context summit that took place at Yale School of Management in 2018.

For a full exploration of the summit participant contributions please see systemschangeeducation.com

INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION





Mainstream innovation and entrepreneurship education offerings tend not to be focused on wholistic systems change competencies and perspectives as previously mentioned, yet with the emerging interest in systems change education, many programs are making shifts. This section includes real-world examples of educational offerings from around the world that exemplify a range of systems change competencies and perspectives each with a narrative description and links for further exploration. Each set of examples is followed by a list of questions that educators might ask themselves when redesigning or expanding educational offerings. Our hope is that the themes and examples explored in this section might inspire or support other social innovation and entrepreneurship educators, as well as those more broadly interested in systems change education, to help shift our collective educational models.

Rethinking Accelerator and Incubator Programs

A cornerstone of many social entrepreneurship education initiatives is some form of accelerator or incubator program typically designed to help “incubate” or “accelerate” the growth of participating social enterprises. Rather than taking a *systems orientation*, most of these programs are designed around an organizational growth framework, overlooking the opportunity to “accelerate” the participants impact through initiatives that might not equate to organizational growth. Some programs are agnostic about the organization’s legal form, while some accept only non-profits or only businesses, yet most tend to focus at the organizational level: they provide support to start or grow a social impact organization. In our exploration of systems change, we have noted that not all change comes from growing social ventures, and that when supporting social ventures, skills beyond start-up training are necessary to support systems-led leadership. As such, we wanted to take a look at accelerator programs that moved beyond traditional start-up growth offerings. Here are a few we might all learn from:

The Epp Peace Incubator in the Kindred Credit Union Centre for Peace Advancement

The Epp Peace Incubator at Conrad Grebel University College in the University of Waterloo is not your average accelerator program. While most accelerators focus on how to grow an organization, the Epp Peace Incubator focuses on how to grow impact by working with and through government.


Some business programs treat government like it is something to work around: a regulating body that gets in the way rather than a key partner in scaling impact. “In peace building, government is never an afterthought,” notes Paul Heidebrecht, Director of the Kindred Credit Union Centre for Peace Advancement. The Epp Peace Incubator aims to help entrepreneurial teams better understand the various roles and functions of government, and then goes beyond their “Government 101” training by making key introductions to influential government officials. They have found that entrepreneurs who understand government and who have been supported in their introductions to officials, can then influence policy, work with government to procure their services, tackle regulatory hurdles, or help provide innovative ideas and overlooked perspectives directly into government conversations.

Visit the [Epp Peace Incubator’s website](#) and [their submission to the Gallery Walk](#) to learn more about their work.

School of System Change

Focused on people working with and within organizations, the School of System Change supports participants to skill-up with a wide range of systems change tools and approaches, from systems mapping and regenerative frameworks to systems leadership. The School is an initiative developed by Forum for the Future, an international sustainability charity focused on systems change. Having run a Masters in Leadership for Sustainability for twenty years, and seen sustainability education become mainstreamed over that time, Forum for the Future launched the School as a response to a growing need for training on systemic thinking and complexity. As one of a few programs explicitly focused on system change, the School attracts a wide ranging audience of change-makers and future leaders who are looking to develop a systems approach to complex challenges.

The School is designed to develop each individuals’ systems practice while helping them develop the ability to cultivate diverse perspectives through cohort-based learning in community with others who come from a range of fields, sectors, and



cultural backgrounds. The School's flagship program is called Basecamp because it seeks to introduce base systems practice in five core capability areas - systems diagnosis, strategy design, innovation for impact, collaboration and engagement, and leadership and learning. Over the course of six months, the participants are introduced to a curated range of tools and methodologies that they apply initially through a team-based fieldwork challenge, and then, with a peer-supported online environment, to their own work. With this spiral pedagogy, key contributors from across the field, and individual coaching, Basecamp is designed to support the growth of leaders, rather than organizations, with the hope that those leaders can then apply their accelerated systems perspective and skills to whichever roles they take on in the future.

Visit the [School's website](#) to learn more about the [School of System Change](#) approach and what people are learning, and explore this collection of [blog articles](#).

Uncharted

Formerly known as the Unreasonable Institute, Uncharted is an accelerator program based in Denver, Colorado. When under the brand Unreasonable Institute, the accelerator program was focused on scaling social impact ventures, selecting a cohort made up of a range of for-profit and non-profit organizations with various geographic and topical areas of focus, sourced from a competitive global pool. The application used to ask questions such as “How will your organization scale to reach 1 million people?”

As one of the most prominent global social impact accelerators, Unreasonable Institute was able to source some of the most exceptional organizations, but as they looked back on their impact and their methodology, they realized something was missing in their ability to “accelerate” this work. Timed with a rebranding to the name Uncharted, the organization now focuses not just on growing impact ventures, but taking on specific problems and social/environmental issues. In 2017 they ran a cohort focused on healthy food access in Denver's urban food deserts. They did deep research into the drivers of food access, found for-profit and non-profit organizations that had proven models addressing those drivers, and then ran an accelerator focused on scaling and uniting organizations with the shared goal of increasing access to affordable, healthy food in low-income neighborhoods across Denver.

You can learn more about [Uncharted](#) on their website or visit this page to read lessons learned from their Denver based [Food Access Accelerator](#).



Questions for Educators:

- What are the goals of your incubator-type program offerings? Does achieving those goals require teaching perspectives and skills beyond organizational growth? If so, which ones? And how could you teach those?
- How is government included in your social innovation and entrepreneurship courses and offerings? Do you want to include more cases and trainings about the role and potential of government in systems change and impact scaling? How might you do that?
- Who is invited to attend your trainings? Are you including perspectives beyond those of social impact start-ups? Are existing organizations, government, people with lived experience, or others included in the conversation? If not enough, how could you increase their participation?
- Are you focused on accelerating organizations or people? Have you hit points where you know a certain social venture is headed down the wrong path and where the team's stated mission might be better served by throwing out their original venture idea and pursuing other approaches to impact? If yes, or if you worry about that, what can you do to help marry students to their intended impact, rather than to their ventures?

Supporting Systems Understanding Before Solution Pitching

Another cornerstone of many social innovation and entrepreneurship programs is a social venture business plan competition. Many of these competitions, like most traditional business plan competitions, invite entrepreneurs to pitch in front of an audience of judges, and sometimes offer grants or social investment funding as a prize. Many of these competitions provide training on business model development and pitching, but are not often designed around a *systems orientation* nor do these competitions often provide *systems tools and trainings*. Many times questions asked in applications for these competitions are similar to those asked in traditional business plan competitions such as “Who are your competitors and how is your offering unique?” Imagine if all social venture pitch competitions or funding applications instead asked questions like this: “How is your offering building upon the successes and failures of other efforts working on the same issue, and how will your work improve the impact potential of other nodes in the systems?” What if these competitions asked applicants to describe or map the systems in which they work and how their offering contributes to shifting the system by contributing to the impact of the collective? The following examples of efforts to rethink business plan competitions and/or incentivize systems understanding highlight some possible options in moving from a competitive to an additive systems change contribution mindset.



Map the System

Map the System is a global competition hosted by the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at Oxford's Said Business School aimed at helping social entrepreneurship and innovation programs rethink their business plan competitions by incentivizing problem and systems understanding. Prior to launching Map the System, the Skoll Centre had been offering students the opportunity to apply for start up funding, but that funding was only available to leadership teams where at least one member was a current Oxford MBA student. Oxford's MBA is a one year program, so that meant students were being asked to excel in their intense one-year course work while also developing an investment ready business model. As a result, only a small number of teams applied for the funding, many with business models that were not grounded in a deep understanding of the problem. These teams might have been better suited to receive research or learning funds. With the knowledge that this problem was happening at innovation programs globally, the Skoll team adjusted their social venture funding to include a systems orientation and wider applicant pool, while also launching Map the System, inviting global organizations to join in this shift.

Rather than pitching a solution to a problem, Map the System invites participants to pitch their understanding of a challenge, the landscape of current solution efforts, and the gaps or areas of possible future leverage for systems change. The competition now runs at about 40 global institutions, inviting undergraduates, graduates, and life-long learners to learn about their chosen challenge. The winners from these global partner institutions come to Oxford to compete in the global final. While funding for the winning teams is provided at the final, and by some host institutions (such as the McConnell and Trico Foundations that fund Map the System across Canada), the ethos is that truly “winning” is about using this systems research to find a path into a high-impact career.

Visit the [Map the System website](#) to learn more about the competition and visit [this page](#) to inquire about signing your educational institution up as a partner.

Global Social Innovation Challenge, Ideas to Serve, & Map the Challenge

Other institutions are redesigning their business plan competitions to incentivize systems understanding before solution pitching. University of San Diego expanded its *Global Social Innovation Challenge* to have three distinct deliverable rounds by adding a new first round that asks participating students from universities around the world to analyze the problem, take a systems level perspective, and identify levers of change. They aligned their deliverables for this round with the Map the

System framework, so students who have entered Map the System can easily jump right into the Global Social Innovation Challenge. Once student teams have analyzed a problem, the second round of the competition invites students to dig deeper into one of the possible levers of change and design an intervention based on their prior systems research, while the third round functions more like a typical pitch competition where winners receive funds and support to launch or grow their proposed idea. The hope is that the inclusion of a systems mapping portion of the competition will result in initiative proposals that are built on a deeper understanding of complex issues and are more likely to contribute to shifting unhealthy systems.

On the other coast, Cornell Dyson School of Applied Economics, Management, & Business launched *Map the Challenge*, a condensed one-week version of the Map the System competition, designed to give students a systems mapping experience and challenge.

Educators at Georgia Tech Scheller College of Business recently redesigned their *Ideas to Serve Competition* (I2S) around a new philosophy: “Know what you don’t know (before you start working on solutions).” The competition now has two separate tracks: problem discovery & solution discovery. While one of the tracks still awards for solution ideas, the competition is now supporting and incentivizing in-depth discoveries of any particular social/environmental issue a student is passionate about.

[Visit the competition websites to learn more about the *Global Social Innovation Challenge*, *Ideas to Serve Competition \(I2S\)*, and *Map the Challenge*.](#)

University of Michigan’s Gala Platform

In 2016, the [Michigan Sustainability Cases \(MSC\)](#) initiative launched at the University of Michigan with several goals: improving classroom teaching and learning, introducing case studies into sustainability education, and re-imagining the form of case studies as flexible, inclusive, multimedia-rich online modules. Cases were selected to help students understand the complexity of sustainability problems and how to balance competing stakeholder interests. To enable this kind of engaged learning, and make the cases available worldwide, MSC created a new, open-access platform for case studies, called [Gala](#). Initially, the MSC team also planned to host a case-writing competition that would cultivate and showcase the best sustainability cases from around the globe as one means of providing an incentive for students and educators to engage in a deep exploration of sustainability issues and to generate guidelines for writing, using, and evaluating sustainability case studies. After additional reflection on the needs of sustainability teachers and learners, the team re-oriented the competition to instead be an annual sustainability learning exchange (called [Galaxy](#)) that convenes an unconventional mix of sustainability

researchers, educators, students, practitioners, and community members around pressing sustainability problems and innovative solutions. Galaxy includes an awards ceremony that celebrates the achievements of case authors who have produced the most outstanding cases over the previous year. While Galaxy does not offer a competition per se, other institutions looking to incentivize case writing may use the [author tools](#) feature on Gala to post their own case studies as part of their own courses or competitions. With a thoughtfully developed toolbox for collaborative sustainability work, Gala is enabling new possibilities for knowledge exchange and broader engagement among students, practitioners, and instructors.

To learn more, visit the [Gala website](#), read about what happened at [Galaxy 2018](#), and find how to submit an abstract at galaxy.learn gala.com.



Questions for Educators:

- How is systems understanding incentivised at your institution? Are there opportunities to make a shift in areas where solution pitching is prioritized before systems understanding?
- What competitions are you currently offering and how do they incentivize or disincentivize the development of a systems perspective?
- Do you offer a social business plan competition or start-up funding application? If so, how might the previous examples influence shifts in your application or judging process?
- Do any of your offerings have questions about “competitors” that could be shifted to help applicants consider how their work will improve the impact potential of other nodes in the systems?
- Is there room or demand at your institution to create new initiatives that foster systems understanding before solution pitching, or to join up with current initiatives previously mentioned or others available globally?

Valuing Lived Experience

In many elite institutions where social innovation and entrepreneurship are taught, educators have noted a common problem: many of their students want to work on problems in which they have no lived experience. While some students are choosing to work on issues that have personally impacted their lives, others are working on problems they haven’t experienced, be that local homelessness and recidivism, or issues impacting people living in emerging markets far from their own homes, such as mini in-home solar systems or sanitation issues in areas with high urban economic poverty. Many times, these issues impact places they have never been or people they have never met.


In Baljeet Sandhu's report on [The Value of Lived Experience](#) and in many of her talks, including her contributions to the Yale convening, she has pointed out that leaders with lived experience of a social problem are often overlooked and undervalued in social impact education. In many social entrepreneurship and design thinking courses, those with lived expertise are often viewed simply as "participants to engage", "focus group members" or "potential clients" rather than leaders, innovators, and pioneers of change who provide a systems perspective that is often missing from elite classrooms. For social innovation education to be effective we need to start equitably and meaningfully valuing 'lived expertise' in social innovation education.

Simply bringing these concepts, terms, and reports into the social innovation classroom can start important conversations on power and equity that are often overlooked or avoided. In many countries, these conversations might be fuelled by a growing public discourse on equity and inclusion, diversity, race, #metoo movements, or populism. The Dunning-Kruger effect highlights a cognitive bias we all face: the less we know about something the simpler it seems. This bias might be why some educators are willing to support student initiatives in foreign countries, countries which neither the educator nor the student intimately understands, yet many educators find it hard to discuss issues related to imbalances of power and inequity in the classroom. Our proximity to these challenges leave us knowing they are complicated, messy, and difficult to shift. However, are we implicit in perpetuating inequity in the world if we avoid these complex challenges.

Here are a few initiatives targeted at shifting the conversations in classrooms to spaces where discussions of equity and social justice are prominent in social innovation discussions and where valuing lived expertise is addressed head on.

Neighbors in Residence (NiR) Program

Baljeet Sandhu was a 2017 Yale World Fellow, a program bringing global social impact leaders to Yale for a semester to expand their networks and learning while contributing to the Yale community. As part of her previously mentioned work on [The Value of Lived Experience](#), Baljeet used her initial time in New Haven to meet leaders with lived experience who were tackling local issues. While these people were leading change efforts in the city, most of these leaders had little, if any, interaction with Yale. At the same time, Baljeet noticed that students she mentored were passionate about getting involved in social change projects in New Haven. She shared many conversations with staff at Dwight Hall, Yale's Center for Public Service and Social Justice, and at the Tsai Center for Innovative Thinking at Yale (CITY), posing one simple question: If Global change-makers have an opportunity to join the Yale Community, can the same not be done for New Haven community leaders with lived experience?



Onyeka Obiocha was already bridging the gap between local social change leaders and the University, having founded a local social initiative while also serving as Associate Director of the Tsai Center for Innovative Thinking at Yale (Tsai CITY). Having noticed many of the same issues and opportunities upon which Baljeet was shining light, and inspired by Johns Hopkins University's Social Innovation Lab, Onyeka launched the Neighbors in Residence (NiR) program in 2018.

NiR is a semester-long fellowship inviting community leaders who have been living and working in New Haven for at least a decade into the Yale community. The Fellows not only bring years of experience from their community leadership work but they are also leaders with lived experience of the specific social issues or injustices they're addressing. The fellowship allows the NiRs to benefit from funding, access to Yale resources, programs, and networks, and uniquely places them in the role of social impact educators teaching Yale students about equitable, collaborative approaches to social change through their weekly office hours and contributions to Yale courses and extracurricular activities.

[Visit the *Neighbors in Residence* contribution to the Gallery Walk or visit the program website to learn more.](#)

Knowledge Equity Initiative & Global Innovation Series – Yale University

Following her time as a Yale World Fellow in 2017, Baljeet Sandhu was invited to return to Yale University to serve as Innovator in Residence at Tsai Center for Innovative Thinking (Tsai CITY) where she launched the *Knowledge Equity Initiative (KEI)*. KEI focuses on how educators, changemakers and innovators can meaningfully and equitably value the knowledge gathered through lived and learned experiences to pioneer social change, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Tsai CITY helped launch the Knowledge Equity Initiative in response to their commitment to 'inspire and support students from diverse backgrounds and disciplines to seek innovative ways to address real-world problems'. They supported the initiative because of their vigorous commitment to cultivate a deeper understanding of how diversity, inclusion, and equity play a vital role in innovation and entrepreneurship beyond the 'diversity tick box' exercise. This ground-breaking initiative brings together a cohort of Knowledge Equity Associates from across Yale to support the design and development of an interdisciplinary program of research, education, and practice pilots, as well as a broad range of partnerships across industries and faculties to support knowledge equity in the innovation field.

The Knowledge Equity Intensive at Yale, is designed to develop students understanding of equity in practice. Through case studies, guest speakers and cohort-based learning, including lived experience leaders (Neighbors in Residence) as educators, students learn a range of competencies focusing on personal and collective leadership, social innovation, systems practice, and building ethical partnerships and collaborations for their future innovation and systems change work. The initiative has attracted a wide range of students from disciplines such as humanities, sciences, architecture, law, public health, computer science, politics and global affairs - all keen to develop an equity approach to their innovation work to tackle challenging and complex world problems.

Rather than seeing communities with lived experience of social and environmental problems as mere informants or participants of innovations or educational approaches, the initiative seeks to platform, elevate, and share learning from leaders with lived experience in their programming. As Baljeet Sandhu notes, “Being a ‘Lived Experience Leader’ means having personal or first-hand experience of a social or environmental problem or injustice, and activating that lived expertise, often in tandem with learned or practice experience, to create positive change for the communities you share those experiences with.

Another initiative launched by Baljeet Sandhu as part of the Knowledge Equity Initiative is the *Global Innovation Series*, a 2018 partnership between Yale’s Maurice R. Greenberg World Fellows Program and Tsai CITY. The series involves a set of events and discussions hosted around Yale’s campus to explore and celebrate the innovative work of groundbreaking global changemakers across industries, geographies, and cultures. Each event is built in partnership with other centers across the university to connect World Fellows with the Yale and New Haven communities and beyond, and to encourage multidisciplinary debate and knowledge exchange.

The events in the inaugural season of the series encompassed a range of topics and themes, including the value of lived experience; the importance of diverse and interdisciplinary perspectives for innovation; how communities around the world are leading radical change across sectors; the need for equitable, contextual approaches to partnership and collaboration in social change work; the role that technology can play in equitable innovation; the importance of resilience when working to address pressing real-world problems; and the many forms that leadership can take in driving change from the ground up, and from within existing organizations and institutions.

The Knowledge Equity Initiative is building leading practices through interdisciplinary collaborations, a growing movement of cross-sector partnerships, and a growing movement of ‘Lived Experience Leaders’ and will be sharing knowledge and learning across local, national, and global communities.



Visit the [Tsai CITY labs page](#) to learn more about the Knowledge Equity Initiative and its programs and forthcoming resources.

Phillippi Campus at the University of Cape Town

François Bonnici, the former founding Director of the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business recognized that many students at elite institutions came from privileged backgrounds and that the voices of those with lived experiences of the inequities these students hoped to challenge were often missing from the classroom. He made a number of adjustments to ensure his classroom wouldn't suffer that fate, such as inviting social innovators and social justice activists with lived experience into courses as fully participating students with free access to the university as recognition for their contributions. While a range of recruiting methods certainly made the UCT classrooms more diverse than many other innovation programs, it was still clear that many privileged students were still mentally and physically far from many of the problems facing South Africa and the wider world.

The Bertha Centre team began partnering with local community organizations in Philippi, one of South Africa's least well served peri-urban townships, 5 minutes from Cape Town International Airport. After many years of developing relationships with local organizations, and years of planning together with the Bertha Foundation and the University, they have built a branch of UCT's Graduate School of Business in the Philippi township, and now ensure that all graduate students take at least one course at the Philippi Campus. Courses taught at Philippi include slots for local community members, and many global institutions are now offering courses, workshops, and programs on the campus. The initiative is still in early stages with much yet to be accomplished, so it is hard to know what the impact of this program will be, but it is clear that relationships with the university are being forged with community organizations in ways that are bringing deeper understanding and sense of commitment by being co-located together. The Philippi project now has support from the new Vice Chancellor who has also committed strategic university funds to its expansion. The concept and ideals are ones that might inspire creativity in other university innovation initiatives.

Learn more about the genesis and philosophy of the Philippi Campus project by visiting the [written and audio contributions to the Gallery Walk](#).



Questions for Educators:


- How are you currently treating people with lived experience, in your classroom or beyond? What shifts would you need to make to better value and highlight this experience as an expertise?
- How are you currently addressing power, privilege, and bias in your classes, both as a construct for consideration in systems change as well as a live issue in the classroom? What shifts would you like to make in how you currently address and surface these topics?
- Who are the current participants in your classes? What perspectives and voices are currently missing, and how might they be added to the mix?

Apprenticing with a Problem & Experiential Education

Antoinette D. Carroll's concepts of equity designers and design allies, offers educators a pathway to both support and highlight the value of lived experience and experiential learning by encouraging students seeking to impact changes in systems they don't yet understand to become allies within the challenge or problem spaces they choose to focus on in their work or study. Doing so requires some sort of "apprenticeship" or "experiential" understanding of the problem or systems in question, beyond the classroom and desk research. The term "Apprenticing with a Problem" was used in co-author Daniela Papi-Thornton's report, [Tackling Heropreneurship](#). She borrowed the term, with permission, from an interview with Jessamyn Shams-Lau, Director of the Peery Foundation, who used the term in courses she taught at Brigham Young University. The term does not mean one needs to walk through fire to understand what it means to be burned, like [Derek Snook](#), who voluntarily decided to live among the homeless for a year. Instead, the "Apprenticing with a Problem" concept is a call to invite students to work with, learn from, or do hands on research in an existing organization or community effort as a means of learning more about a problem and the system holding it in place in order to find opportunities to contribute to change, rather than initially jumping in to take the lead on starting a new venture to solve it. It relates to the concept of a *design ally*, as it is an invitation to find a way to be of service in shifting an inequitable system, without needing to be the "founder" or "director" of such change. There are many models inviting students to immerse themselves in a local or global challenge, and here are three examples that might inspire more.

"Apprenticing with a Problem" Funding

While serving as the Deputy Director of the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship, co-author Daniela Papi-Thornton shared her Tackling Heropreneurship research with the Skoll Centre team, and they decided to launch a new funding opportunity that



would invite students to apprentice with problems, as opposed to funding inviting them to try to “solve” said problems. To apply for the funding, students first had to enter the previously described Map the System competition, as a means of showing their commitment to systems understanding. Participants were then invited to apply for Apprenticing with a Problem Funding that could be used for research projects, internships, or other job opportunities, thereby helping students get their foot in the door to begin to learn about or work on shifting their chosen challenge. After a minimum of three months, grantees were asked to share their experience in an online format so that others could benefit from their learning. While the Skoll Centre no longer offers this funding in the same format, the McConnell and Trico Foundations provide “Apprenticing with a Problem” Funding opportunities to Canadian winners of Map the System and other educators have incorporated similar concepts in their funding models.

Learn more about how to implement this funding by reading the Skoll Centre’s [Apprenticing with a Problem Briefing Note](#) designed to help others replicate the model.

Permaculture for Systemic Change Course

Prescott College offers one month intensive “Block Courses” in their resident degree Bachelor’s program that often bring students out of the classroom and into the field. This highlights the College’s commitment to experiential learning for the environment, social justice, and sustainability, as well as student self-directed field-based learning. For three years co-author, Joshua Cubista, taught the Permaculture For Systemic Change course. The course, for 14 students per program, was largely conducted via passenger van, taking students on learning journeys throughout the Mogollon highlands and the Arizona/Mexico Border region.

Through the program students were introduced to leaders in the field and region in such practices as Arcology and design at [Arcosanti](#), and Permaculture and ecological design exemplars, such as [Deep Dirt Institute](#), and the [ECOSA Institute](#). Through these interactions and partnered experiential activities, students were able to meaningfully engage with the broader network or learning ecosystem of the region and experience first-hand how the approaches and methods taught in the course could be applied in creating real-world impact. Through learning journeys, student-led co-teaching, and collaborative design challenges the course incorporated participatory design methodologies, rapid prototyping, and systems leadership capacity building to prepare students to address complex challenges through design and collaborative leadership in the field.

You can learn more about this innovative course by reviewing the syllabus and course overview [here](#) and learn more about the Prescott College and its programs [here](#).

Systems Changers

The Systems Changers programme was initiated by [Lankelly Chase](#) in 2015. Based in the UK, it is a blended learning programme specifically offered to frontline workers working on a host of social challenges.

Frontline workers form the lifeblood of the systems which support facing experiencing complex and multiple disadvantage. They deliver the policies formed in the corridors of power in central government and the services commissioned in town halls. They are the ones who have day-to-day contact with people experiencing homelessness, abuse, mental health crisis, addiction or a combination of these. Yet their perspectives rarely form part of developing the policies and services they deliver and their insights are rarely included in efforts to reform the multiple systems they work in. These systems include public service systems, support systems and the systems in their organisation. Frontline workers rarely feel they possess the power to make these systems work for the people they support.

Lankelly Chase saw this gap and partnered with [Point People](#) and [Snook](#) to tackle it with the Systems Changers programme. The ambition of the programme is to enable frontline workers to contribute to and design systemically for change. The programme brings a more systemic view to frontline practice, empowering workers to gain a sense of agency to influence the multiple systems they work within, and to see the power of their insights being connected across the system as a way to mobilise greater change. The programme consists of visits, experiential learning, skills and knowledge development, and the analysis of systems and discovery of routes for influencing through ethnography and experimentation. Participants experience the plurality of ways to influence change through three lenses:

- Themselves as individuals.
- Their organisations.
- The wider system.

The programme was first piloted in 2015 and 2016 in England, and now looking at how it is delivered in different contexts - working beyond the idea of frontline workers to other actors in the system and looking at how it works with a focus on a sector, a place, and through a train the trainer model. At the heart of these experiments is a desire for systemic practices to spread and become more democratic.

To learn more about the Systems Changers programme, view this short video introduction [here](#).



Questions for Educators:

- Are your students often eager to work on social or environmental problems that they have not personally experienced? If so, how might the prior ideas impact how you support those students on their learning journeys?
- Do you currently offer start-up funding? If so, what is the current quality of the applications for that funding? Are current applicants deeply embedded in the problems they seek to ameliorate and do they have a deep understanding of the systems in which they operate? If not, is there room for other funding or support opportunities, such as the “Apprenticing with a Problem” model, that might be considered?
- How might you share the learning from those at the “front lines” of social change, who are apprenticing with problems and whose perspectives might be useful in education or practitioner systems change models?

Educational Ecosystems

Educational Ecosystems unite the internal actors within a school, university, or learning organization such as the students, teachers, and administrators with the wider community and stakeholders within which an institution is placed. The wider network of actors (families, organizations, businesses, faith groups, government, etc.) all contribute to the character and quality of education received. This in turn increases opportunities learners have to create real-world impact and prepare students as leaders of 21st century challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, by linking learner experience with external actors in the wider ecosystem, this collaborative and networked approach to education increases opportunities for students to build key relationships with stakeholders that can extend well beyond a students’ educational career and provide stepping stones into their given vocation.

By their very nature, educational ecosystems are inherently systemic, collaborative, and solution focused. As the OECD report [*The Outward Looking School and Its Ecosystem*](#) suggests, “Schools are living environments that allow for interactions between learners, educators and the community of people surrounding the environment. The nature of these interactions is crucial to stimulate creativity, trust and the freedom to evolve and transform.” The report further suggests that the more internal/external stakeholders participate within educational ecosystems the more learning and impact is possible for participants and the wider community. The [*PKG Center*](#) at MIT for example, has for the last 30 years provided students with service-based learning opportunities to prepare them as social innovators tackling complex social and environmental challenges. Similarly, the executive program

also at MIT being offered in 2019, [*Innovation Ecosystems: A New Approach to Accelerating Corporate Innovation and Entrepreneurship*](#), prepares business leaders to apply “ecosystem-based open innovation approaches” that enable collaboration between stakeholders. Educational Ecosystems are emerging around the world as 21st century responses to the increasing interconnected and complex world in which we learn and work. The following examples highlight aspects of educational ecosystem approaches:

Re-Code

As a funder, capacity-builder and convenor, Re-Code, an initiative of the McConnell Foundation, works with universities and colleges to better use their financial, physical, relational, research, and educational resources to support community well-being. Through partnerships across institutions and sectors, the Re-Code team envisions, and tries to help create the conditions for, a more resilient, just, and sustainable world.

The goals of Re-Code, include:

- Maximizing the capacities of advanced educational institutions to build social infrastructure
- Supporting the development of “ecologies” of social innovation and entrepreneurship
- Providing opportunities for students to learn about (and experiment with) social innovation and entrepreneurship
- Increasing access to existing knowledge and facilitating cross-sector learning


Since 2014 Re-Code has supported 80 diverse institutions across Canada to advance social innovation education and create real-world impact.

Learn more about Re-Code [here](#).

Ashoka U & The Global Change Leaders

Often credited with coining the term “social entrepreneurship” and having elected over 3,500 systems-changing social entrepreneurs across more than 90 countries, [*Ashoka*](#)’s brand recognition and global network of Ashoka Fellows and changemakers makes the organization an ideal hub for contributing to systems change education. Here are two branches of the organization worth highlighting in that regard:

With a vision of making social innovation and changemaking education a new norm across higher education, *Ashoka U* encourages systems change at multiple levels – in the classroom, across the institution, and across the field at large. Since its founding in 2008, Ashoka U has co-created together with university partners



a vision for and strategic benefits of becoming a ‘[changemaker institution](#)’. The organization advocates for social innovation to be both an educational pathway for students to develop 21st century skills and an institutional change strategy that rewires the entire institution to be adaptive and innovative as it serves as an agent of social impact in its community. Through its work with over 5,000 individuals at 500 campuses across over 50 countries, Ashoka U cultivates an ecosystem of innovators that are reimaging and transforming both educational programming and institutional structures and cultures. The [Ashoka U Exchange](#), one of the world’s largest convening of social innovators in higher education, is an annual conference of approximately 700 students, faculty, administrators, senior leaders, and community leaders from across 140 global institutions. In addition to being a venue for sharing and building leading practices, as importantly it fosters and fuels a community and identity of changemaking educational innovators. Ashoka U’s most rigorous program [Changemaker Campus](#), is both a designation for campuses that model this campus-wide excellence in social innovation and changemaking and a collaborative network committed to advancing the field of social innovation and changemaking education together.

The Global Change Leaders is another exemplar of an educational ecosystem approach from the global Ashoka network. The Global Change Leaders is an international community dedicated to creating learning ecosystems while supporting and building the capacity of educators and practitioners who are committed to “weaving” or bringing together key stakeholders at the institutional, city, regional, and national level to empower universal wellbeing. With a commitment to transforming institutional silos into learning ecosystems, Change Leaders or “Weavers” within the network work through [The Weaving Academy](#) to foster alignment, collaboration, and systems level change with innovators, educators, policymakers, and thought leaders around the world.

Learn more about Ashoka U [here](#) and about The Global Change Leaders network [here](#).

Global Education Futures

Global Education Futures is an initiative dedicated to collaboratively designing, prototyping, and evolving educational systems worldwide. Over the last ten years this global initiative has focused on research and development of innovative educational programs and partnerships, and the convening of rapid foresight forums around the world; engaging over 500 educational innovators in 50 countries at the institutional, regional, and national level. The work of Global Education Futures focuses on the development of projects and programs that include such elements as:

- Whole person development

- Lifelong learning
- Navigating complexity
- Future creating, and
- Fostering educational ecosystems

In their recent report [Educational Ecosystems for Societal Transformation](#) it is suggested that in the face of “mega-trends” such as digitalization, automation, global demographic shifts, coupled with the complex transformations taking place in society, that education systems, as foundational contributors to the development of human culture, must evolve to meet the needs of learners and leaders of the 21st century. And furthermore, that schools and universities are ideally placed to become educational ecosystems for lifelong and intergenerational learning, bringing together communities, businesses, and civil society as communities of practice that can support transitions in society toward desirable futures.

Learn more about the work of Global Education Futures, [here](#), and read the Educational Ecosystems For Societal Transformation report, [here](#).



Questions for Educators:

- What educational ecosystems might you consciously or unconsciously be a part of?
- Is there an opportunity to build a more collaborative educational ecosystem within your current geography or area of focus? How might you contribute to or initiate such an opportunity?
- How might working and learning collaboratively across institutional and community divides foster systems change competencies and perspectives in innovation education?

CONCLUSION

Our hope is that this glimpse into systems change competencies and perspectives coupled with examples of educational innovations will provide a useful set of opportunities that educators can use to incorporate into their programs in context relevant ways. With the growing interest in systems change terms and mindsets in social innovation education, it is hopefully just a matter of time until many systems thinking and systems practice methodologies are embedded as keystone components of social innovation education. However, our aspiration goes beyond this. We would like to see systems change as a set of key competencies supporting the learning journeys of a new generation of social innovators whose combined efforts can radically shift the markers on some of the most complex and challenging issues of our time.

In summary, in order to make that shift, social innovation educators looking to incorporate systems change competencies and perspectives into their educational offerings might evaluate if their programs include:

- Connection between personal development and our collective capacity to create desired futures
- Insight into complex dynamics, challenges, and opportunities
- Theory, tools, and frameworks to support learners in understanding complex contexts
- Practices and processes that enable multi-stakeholders to work together across divides to create relevant socio-ecological innovations at a systems level scale of impact

In many ways, trying to teach about or write about systems change is like trying to take something non-linear and make it linear, or put something in a box that is designed to be outside of a box. As such, we recognize that this report only begins to scratch the surface of what is possible with truly systems-led innovation education, though we hope it is enough to start a useful conversation and spark new ideas. We invite others who are rethinking innovation education with a systems change lens to contribute to this exploration of how we, as educators, might positively shift systems toward desired futures through inspiring our students to become systems-led leaders. We hope to collaborate to evolve curricula, and to inquire together into what systems change means for our own pedagogies, teaching styles, and approaches.


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About the Report Authors

Forum for the Future’s [School of System Change](#) seeks to grow the number of people using systems change practices to address complex challenges. The ambition is to serve the emerging field of systems change as a vehicle for connecting and amplifying spheres of learning and practice, cultivating and connecting a global community of changemakers, as well as to develop this work as a systems change endeavour. [Anna Birney](#), Director of the School and author of *Cultivating System Change: A Practitioner’s Companion* (2014), brings her years of work cultivating



systems change practice in multiple sectors to supporting the design of learning programs (based on [five capabilities](#)) that support changemakers navigate this emerging field. [Laura Winn](#) heads up the School coordinating the emergent strategy, and ensuring the initiative is run as a sustainable system change venture. Laura brings her experience of social enterprise, new economic structures, and multi-stakeholder governance. The School of System Change is working collaboratively with a growing community of people and organizations in Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

Daniela Papi-Thornton is an educator, consultant, and author whose current work focuses on [Systems-Led Leadership](#). She has served as a Lecturer at Yale School of Management, Watson Institute, and Oxford Saïd Business School, and was the Deputy Director of the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship. She continues to consult with Oxford's Skoll Centre in support of the [Map the System](#) competition, which she helped launch. Her online platform and consulting practice helps practitioners and educators design learning, leadership, and funding programs that focus on helping future changemakers understand systems. Her [Tackling Heropreneurship](#) report, [Learning Service book](#), [Impact Gaps Canvas](#), and TEDx talk on [Rethinking Social Entrepreneurship](#) highlight some of her thinking.

Joshua Cubista is the founding Dean of the Social Innovation Institute in Toronto Canada, an institute dedicated to advancing systems change and social innovation education and capacity building. He is an international experiential designer, facilitator, and strategist. Joshua is the founder of [Evolution Lab](#), a design atelier offering experiential and experimental prototyping and systemic innovation processes for organizations, communities, and multi-stakeholder groups. He is a Fellow with the [Academy For Systems Change](#) and the [Biophilia Foundation](#) and is the author of [Prototyping Our Future: Social Labs For A Sustainable, Regenerative & Thriving Future](#), and a co-author of the [Global Education Futures Report: Educational Ecosystems For Societal Transformation](#). Joshua's work unites human potential, collaborative leadership, and systemic change approaches to co-creating optimal responses to the complex opportunities and challenges of the 21st century.

RESOURCES

FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE EDUCATION

While there are now many books and toolkits on systems change, what follows is a short, curated selection of readings and tools that support the competencies and perspectives explored in this report.

Thinking in Systems: A Primer, Donella Meadows, edited by Diana Wright

Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008

As one of the founders of the systems dynamics movement, and co-author of the *Limits to Growth* report, Donella Meadows' book is a fantastic and very readable introduction to systems thinking in service of a sustainable and just world. A must read for all aspiring system changers!

*You can purchase the book [here](#) and read more about Donella Meadows and some of her key articles including *Dancing with Systems* [here](#).*

A Systems View of Life, A Unifying Vision, Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi

Cambridge University Press, 2014

For a more dense and integral view of how the systems approach came about in scientific thinking over the centuries, and how different disciplines are coming together into a new systemic conception of life, this is a great book. The authors examine the history of key concepts, as well as the implications of this new view for different sectors and challenges in the world today.

You can read more about the book and purchase it [here](#).

Embracing Complexity: Strategic Perspectives for an Age of Turbulence, Jean Boulton, Peter Allen, and Cliff Bowman

Oxford University Press, 2015

Co-authored by one of the key contributors to the School of System Change, this is a deep dive into the concept of complexity, and the implications of embracing this way of seeing the world for decision-makers, from policy makers to entrepreneurs and managers. It presents multiple approaches to complexity and concrete examples of what a complexity worldview means in practice.

You can read more about the book and purchase it [here](#).

Systems Thinking For Social Change, David Peter Stroh

Chelsea Green Publishing, 2015

Written by one of the key contributors to the Academy of Systems Change, this book is a practical guide on how to use systems thinking and systems mapping to address social challenges. It involves a wealth of real-world examples from a wide selection of issues and sectors.

You can purchase the book [here](#).

Leading from the Emerging Future, Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer

Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2013

From the founders of the Presencing Institute, this book is a wonderful introduction to how we might lead differently - whether in large organizations or as founders of new social ventures, and how we influence the systems we work with - in alignment with a new paradigm of society based on ecosystem principles.

You can read more about the book and purchase it [here](#) and read more about publications from the Presencing Institute [here](#).



Systemic Action Research, Danny Burns

Bristol University Press, 2007

A key contributor to the School of System Change, Danny Burns shares his wealth of experience and knowledge in developing practiced-based approaches to working with people in systems to address the complex situations they face.

You can read more about the book and purchase it [here](#) (UK) or [here](#) (N. and S. America).

The Systems Thinking Playbook, Linda Booth Sweeney and Dennis Meadows

Chelsea Green Publishing, 2010

This is a really fun book, packed with 30 different games designed to help kids and adults experience systems thinking in a playful way. Each description clearly explains when, how, and why the game is useful. There are explicit instructions for debriefing each exercise as well as a list of all required materials. Perfect for bringing sessions on systems change alive and making this learning more experiential.

You can read more about the book and purchase it [here](#).

Equity-Centered Community Design Field Guide

Creative Reaction Lab

As described on their site, “Equity-Centered Community Design, created by Creative Reaction Lab, is a unique creative problem solving process based on equity, humility-building, integrating history and healing practices, addressing power dynamics, and co-creating with the community.” This report may be useful for those educators looking to rethink design thinking or other innovation methodologies by incorporating an equity and power analysis lens and for anyone looking to better value and empower *equity designers*.

Purchase a printed copy or download the field guide [here](#).

Learning Service, by Claire Bennett, Joseph Collins, Zahara Heckscher, and Daniela Papi-Thornton

Red Press, 2018

Report co-author, Daniela Papi-Thornton is also a co-author of *Learning Service*, a book written to help people reconsider the volunteer travel model. While the book is especially useful for those considering internal service, the book is also designed to help future change makers consider how personal and global development are entirely interlinked. The sections on “Embracing a Learning Mindset” and “Cultivating and Practicing Attitudes” would be particularly useful for consideration in personal development models.

You can visit the [Learning Service website](#) to learn more about the model or purchase the book [here](#).

We Can Do This, Kate Sutherland

Kate Sutherland’s book explores “10 Tools to Unleash our Collective Genius.” Tools such as Theory U and Appreciative Inquiry are summarized and explained in cogent and compelling ways, which make them accessible for both educators and students. She adds tips for implementation, such as pitfalls to avoid, and examples of how this work relates to personal development.

You can [read the book for free here](#) or purchase your own physical copy.

Student Guide to Mapping a System, Anna Johnson, Daniela Papi-Thornton, and James Stauch

Mount Royal University Institute for Community Prosperity

This interactive guide includes a wide breadth of educational materials and learning tools designed to help students and practitioners navigate the process of learning about and mapping a system. A companion guide for educators, the *Teaching Guide to Map the System*, helps educators turn the student guide into a series of co-curricular or academic course-based workshops. While both of these guides were designed to specifically match with the Map the System competition deliverables, they should have wider use for any educators looking to incorporate systems perspectives and systems mapping in their innovation courses.

Both the [*Student Guide to Mapping a System*](#) and the [*Teaching Guide to Map the System*](#) are available to download online.

Databases for Problem Understanding

These databases might serve as useful teaching tools or research resources for students or educators looking to incentivize or explore a specific social or environmental issue.

Ballard Brief: A new and growing initiative at Brigham Young University to create a searchable database of reports on a range of social and environmental topics.

LearnGala: A collection of case studies searchable by different sustainability issues run by the University of Michigan.

SIMA Classroom: A curated repository of international short documentary films searchable by social issue and by UN SGDs.

Transformation Maps: An effort by the World Economic Forum, searchable by topic, that explores a range of topics and their global implications.

The Futures Centre: a platform by Forum for the Future collecting signals of change and offering sense-making into key trends shaping the future.

NOTES



SYSTEMS CHANGE EDUCATION IN AN INNOVATION CONTEXT



To read this report online, please visit
systemschangeeducation.com